



## **NDI/CEPPS Quarterly Report: January 1 to March 31, 2005**

### **AZERBAIJAN: Strengthening Political Parties and Civil Society Organizations**

**USAID Associate Cooperative Agreement No. 112-A-00-03-00016-00, under the Leader  
Cooperative Agreement No. DGC-A-00-01-0004-00**

**Project dates: June 10, 2002 to September 9, 2005**

#### **I. SUMMARY**

The environment for democratic development in Azerbaijan continued to deteriorate this quarter. The government limited further the activities of democratic political activists and intensified harassment of journalists and independent media. The programs of international organizations have been disrupted in the regions and Baku, and the National Democratic Institute (NDI or the Institute) continues to be prevented from conducting programming outside the capital city. The government has rebuffed NDI's overtures of cooperation and assistance.

Political parties and civic organizations have begun activities to prepare for the November 2005 national parliamentary elections. Three major opposition parties have formed a coalition, for the first time since Azerbaijan's independence, to coordinate their campaigns in the 125 single-mandate districts that will be on the ballot.

The Institute's programs in Azerbaijan seek to promote a transparent election process and assist political parties to grow in size and influence in the political arena. Despite being restricted to activity in Baku, NDI was able to conduct programming for regional political party members and independent political activists, party leaders, and women. NDI began reviewing the work of civic organizations to determine which group has the capacity to organize nonpartisan election monitoring on a national basis. The Institute also made considerable efforts to encourage government officials to participate in NDI programming. NDI will continue and intensify these activities in the next quarter as the parliamentary elections near.

#### **II. BACKGROUND**

Ilham Aliyev succeeded his father Heydar as president of Azerbaijan following a deeply flawed election process in October 2003. Since that time, the government of Azerbaijan has

persisted in intimidating and harassing its critics. This quarter, Elmar Huseynov, independent journalist and outspoken critic of the Aliyev regime was gunned down outside his apartment, in what was by all accounts a politically motivated homicide. Other journalists have been routinely harassed, the public transportation minister has prohibited the sale of independent and opposition newspapers, and political activists continue to be refused legally required government permission to hold public rallies. In spite of the government's persistence in closing the political process, opposition political parties have united in a coalition to compete for 125 single-mandate seats during the parliamentary elections in November 2005.

Since 1995, the Institute has worked with Azerbaijan's major political parties to assist them in becoming more competitive and to develop the skills required to function within a semi-closed political system. NDI has implemented training programs for the governing Yeni Azerbaijan Party (YAP) and the main democratic opposition political parties, including the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party (APFP), the Azerbaijan National Independence Party (ANIP), and the Musavat Party. NDI's relationship with YAP and the government became strained in the summer of 2003, when YAP party members were forbidden by government officials from participating in NDI trainings. The Institute was itself refused an invitation to monitor the October 2003 presidential election. Since then, NDI has made numerous overtures both to the national government and YAP, issuing invitations to government leaders and ruling party members to participate in its programming. These offers have been ignored.

Over the years, NDI has worked with three civic organizations. For the Sake of Civil Society (FSCS), which NDI helped create in 1997, acted as a multi-partisan domestic monitoring and civic education organization. The Organization for Protection of Women's Rights (OPWR) is a nonpartisan grassroots organization that seeks to advance the social, economic and political rights of women. NDI has also worked closely with the Election Monitoring Center (EMC), a coalition of 15 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working to build civil society. Although FSCS has shifted its focus away from monitoring and OPWR has developed greater financial independence, NDI continues to involve all three groups in the Institute's programming.

NDI's objectives under this project include: the further development of political parties; the promotion of dialogue among political parties, NGOs and government officials aimed at the adoption and implementation of reform legislation and policies; and the training of election observers to monitor and report on all aspects of the election process.

NDI's programs in Azerbaijan correspond to USAID/Caucasus strategic objective 2.1, "Civil Society Better Organized and Represented," and the Intermediate Results 2.1.1, "Issue-based formal and informal associations/advocacy groups organized and active," 2.1.1.1, "Improved capacity for public outreach and advocacy," and 2.1.1.2, "Improved organizational management," 2.1.2.2 "Adoption and implementation of key laws and policies," and 2.1.2.3, "Increased public awareness of legal, policy, and political advocacy framework."

### III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

#### *Political Party Strengthening*

Despite obstacles to their development, political parties in Azerbaijan have begun preparing vigorously for the November 2005 parliamentary elections. This quarter, NDI held consultations with national political party leaders and possible independent candidates. The Institute also continued its training program to build the campaign skills of regional political party members. While NDI continued to reach out and offer assistance to YAP, on a number of occasions, party members simply would not attend, or would cancel at the last minute.

#### Party Training

Azerbaijan will hold single-mandate parliamentary elections in fall 2005. The switch from proportional to single-mandate elections requires that parties campaign more intensely in districts, and choose candidates to compete successfully in each of 125 jurisdictions. By uniting in a coalition, three main opposition parties – APFP, ADP, and Musavat – are now better able to allocate their resources and can be more competitive during the elections. They are seeking NDI's advice and assistance on how best to proceed during the campaign period, and in preparing their regional operatives to conduct successful campaigns. This quarter, NDI conducted consultations with party leaders, and continued its program to train regional political party members in five regions and independent candidates in Baku.

NDI continued to train regional party members and potential candidates on basic campaign skills. The Institute's party training seminars combine group discussions, individual consultations, the distribution of printed campaign materials and practical exercises that engage participants. The first portion of each seminar was spent reviewing lessons from past sessions to provide a basic starting point from which to build on participants' knowledge.

From January 24-27 ANIP, APFP and Musavat sent five to six party members from five regional centers – Guba, Sumgayit, Sheki, Jalilabad, and Ganja – to Baku for training on message development and delivery. Each of the participants attended a day-long message training seminar with fellow party members, focused on how to conduct research on issues and establish positions that can be contrasted with competing candidates. The participants prepared sample campaign literature using modern design principles to convey a message. Many of the participants who had attended training sessions in October had written campaign plans, which the Institute reviewed and returned to participants with constructive comments and suggestions.

NDI held the third training session in this series from March 15-17, to which 25 to 30 party members were invited from the same five regions. The March training session focused on establishing and managing a campaign headquarters. It covered staff roles, how to develop chain of command, and creating a budget and campaign calendar. The participants had retained much of the knowledge they gained in past trainings and were able to integrate this with new material. During the sessions, NDI reviewed the basic principles of a campaign plan, including establishing goals for targeting voters and gaining their support, and developing and delivering a message. NDI asked those participants who were sent to Poland for intensive training with the

European Institute for Democracy (EID), to share experiences and lessons learned from their trip. Reports were positive and one participant in particular, from ANIP, spoke eloquently about how he learned that making a concerted effort to speak to individual voters makes a difference. He also spoke about the importance of a unified opposition. NDI recognizes that much of the work ahead lies in assisting candidates and campaign workers to apply correctly the lessons they learned in training.

On February 2 and March 18, NDI conducted multi-party trainings for women and youth. Similar to the trainings the Institute conducted for individual parties, the sessions focused on developing a message and running a campaign headquarters. Participants attended from YAP, Musavat, APFP, Umid, Azerbaijan Liberal Democrats, and Free Democrats Union. Many participants in these programs had been in previous NDI seminars, but had failed to apply the knowledge acquired from those activities. This is in part due to the lack of women and youth who participate fully in mainstream party activities.

### Consultations with Party Leaders

NDI continued to assess the potential of independent candidates and small political parties. The Institute met with the following political activists who are considering running for parliament: Ilgar Mammedov on January 4 and March 25; Arustun Orujlu on January 31; and Igbal Alizade, chairman of the Umid party. Each discussed his/her plans for the parliamentary elections and possibilities for working with NDI.

The Institute continued consultations with party leaders from Musavat, ADP, APFP, ANIP, and the Liberal Party to review the parties' activities and intentions for the parliamentary elections. During consultations held in late February and early March, NDI encouraged these and other parties to seek out colleagues who shared their values and build coalitions, which would make the parties more competitive on election day. Isa Gambar of Musavat and Ali Kerimli of APFP have formed a coalition along with ADP, and have begun moving forward actively in the candidate selection process. NDI encouraged the Liberal Party to take part in such a coalition, but the party's chairwoman, Lala Shovket, was not amenable to the idea. The Institute also met with Vurgun Ayyub of Musavat and Fuad Mustafayev of Popular Front in early February as well as Rashad Bayramov, a member of the ANIP Political Council, on January 4. NDI discussed with Bayramov the resignation of ANIP Party Chair Etibar Mammedov.

Ali Kerimli visited Washington, D.C. from February 14-19. NDI invited a variety of U.S. government officials, NGO and think tank leaders and members of the news media to hear Kerimli outline his views and explain his party's goals for the upcoming election. NDI offers the same opportunity to all NGO and party activists visiting Washington. The Institute also consulted with Kerimli to advise him on coalition building.

### Government Relations

While the government has from time to time been willing to discuss NDI programming, members of the government and ruling party consistently turned down NDI's offers of assistance this quarter. They also refused an invitation to participate in NDI's January 13 discussion forum and the

women's roundtable held on March 22. For over a year, NDI has been unable to conduct programming in the regions and the Ministry of Justice has denied the Institute registration.

The Institute continued to attempt to develop working relationships with members of parliament (MPs) and lower level government officials this quarter. NDI met with women MPs Bahar Muradova, Gultakin Hajiyeva and Malahat Hasanova, as well as Nazim Ibrahimov, chairman of the State Committee on the Affairs of Azeris Living Abroad, to secure their participation in the Institute's March 22 women's roundtable. After several positive meetings during which each pledged his/her participation, and Ibrahimov agreed to be keynote speaker, all three cancelled at the last minute.

NDI continued to reach out to YAP this quarter by offering assistance and inviting party members to Poland for intensive campaign training. YAP ultimately refused or cancelled all offers of participation and planned programming. Party Deputy Secretary Siyavoush Novoruz originally confirmed travel dates for an NDI-organized trip to Poland, but the party abruptly cancelled the trip at the last minute. Following this, NDI met with Novoruz, Ali Akhmedov, deputy director of YAP, and YAP MP Mubariz Gurbanli, but little changed as a result of the meeting. While NDI will continue to reach out to the government and ruling party, the Institute cannot guarantee their participation in NDI programming.

### *Women's Initiative*

Women are largely underrepresented in government and political parties in Azerbaijan, and those that are politically active have long worked in isolation from one another. Many women have been trained to run for office, but there has been little dialogue between political parties and civic organizations aimed at ensuring women's representation. The Institute has been facilitating discussion on ways in which to increase women's participation. NDI's women's roundtables have provided a forum for members of political parties, civic organizations and government agencies to discuss how to improve institutions and parties to be more inclusive for women.

On March 22, NDI held a women's roundtable entitled Conducting Outreach and Advocacy to Increase Women's Participation attended by 25 participants from NGOs, political parties, and government offices attended. The roundtable featured Sabit Baghirov, chairman of the Support Foundation for the Development of Entrepreneurship and Market Economy, and Sajida Abdulvahabova, director of the Union Research on Women's Issues. Abdulvahabova spoke about the lack of legally sanctioned lobbying in Azerbaijan and problems of corruption related to lobbying. Baghirov discussed the history of lobbying across several countries as well as the accomplishments of NGOs in advocacy efforts. Ilhamiyya Rzayeva of Space TV served as the moderator.

Topics selected by the group included quotas for women candidates, applying a quota system to political parties or even to ballots, and simplifying registration procedures to make it easier for women to run for office. While many disagreed on whether a quota system was relevant, useful, or realistic, the participants agreed to advocate for: greater women's participation in political parties; the registration of women NGOs; and a public roundtable to be held in the Office of the State Women's Committee. The discussion was clearly focused and the participants were all comfortable talking with

one another during the session. The program clearly has developed continuity and the roundtables serve as an environment in which it is safe to constructively discuss issues and policy.

The Institute continued to meet regularly this quarter with the two women who have provided much of the impetus for the women's program – Bahar Muradova, MP and deputy on Women's Issues, and Novella Jafarova, head of the Organization for the Protection of Women's Rights (OPWR). The Institute also reached out to government representatives to participate, but the Ombusman's office and a representative of the Constitutional Court were the only two who attended. Although invited, two women MPs who had participated in past roundtables, Malahat Hasanova and Gultakin Hajiyeveva, ultimately did not attend.

### *Civic Organizations*

While NDI provided no monetary support to civic organizations this quarter, the Institute did maintain regular contact with EMC and continued to survey the role of various civil society groups in Azerbaijan. The Institute met with representatives of several civic organizations to learn about their activities: Sheyda Nasibova of the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections; the Azerbaijani-American Youth Social Association on January 28; Nadir Adilov, Chairman of the Young Lawyer's Association on January 28; the newly formed Free Choice Committee on February 18; Novalla Jafarova of OPWR on February 22; Eldar Ismayilov of FSCS on February 24; Ali Guliyev, Chairman of the Support Center for Democratic Elections on March 10; Azay Guliyev, president of the National NGO Forum; Vahid Ghazi of the Imam Pluralism Center on March 14, after he had joined EMC; Asif Nasibov, Center for Political and Economic Reforms on March 16, EMC member; and Arif Aliyev on March 17.

Through these meetings, and based on NDI's cooperation with EMC in the past, NDI has determined that EMC has the greatest potential as compared to other groups, to organize a nationwide election monitoring effort. The group's members have participated in international election observation efforts organized by the European Network of Election Monitoring Organizations (ENEMO) in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. EMC has also organized election monitoring efforts in the past. While EMC must continue to develop its structures and decisionmaking mechanisms, the group's members have a wealth of experience and are enthusiastic about conducting a monitoring effort.

NDI recruited three civic activists from Azerbaijan to observe the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan on February 27 and again on March 13. The activists took part in an effort organized by ENEMO to deploy 30 and 20 observers, respectively, throughout Kyrgyzstan to monitor and report on the election process.

### *Baku-based Discussion Forum*

Based on the need for greater dialogue on policy issues in Azerbaijan, NDI developed a program to promote dialogue and debate on important political issues among political parties, NGOs and government officials. On January 13, the Institute held its first policy discussion forum in Baku. The topic of the discussion was regional development. Jason Hyland, deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Baku, introduced the program, which drew 20

participants., USAID agricultural development specialist John Brannaman spoke and Khalel Taghiyev of Internews moderated. Many participants appreciated the topic and the discussion, but were disappointed by the government's absence (despite NDI's overtures). NDI plans to have the forum participants develop a set of recommendations, which will then be published. The Institute also plans to conduct more advance work for the next forum, so all have equal expectations. These innovations will help ensure that the discussions are productive whether or not the government participates.

#### *Other*

The Institute has begun meeting with representatives of international organizations in Baku to coordinate efforts in advance of the parliamentary elections. During the quarter, NDI met with the Friedrich Naumann Institute, representatives of the Open Society Institute (OSI), and Bill Holbrook of Mercy Corps. The Institute discussed with Holbrook his contacts with potential independent candidates in the regions. NDI will continue to ensure that its efforts are not redundant, and that the Institute is apprised of what other international organizations are doing in Azerbaijan.

NDI brought regional political party members to Poland for a week-long trip from February 7-12. The party members traveled to Warsaw and Gdansk to learn firsthand how democracy works in Poland and to be trained on general campaign techniques. The trip was funded by a separate grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

#### **IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

*Objective: To promote dialogue among political parties, NGOs and government officials aimed at the adoption and implementation of reform legislation and policies.*

While the Baku discussion forum did not accomplish this objective, it laid the groundwork for doing so, and helped NDI consider the steps to take to ensure that the next forum is more productive.

*Objective: Create a cadre of regional party members skilled in the areas of campaigning and local party practices.*

Despite the government's harassment of opposition parties, NDI was able to conduct some limited training for regional political party members. The training exposed the party members to modern campaign techniques, and NDI has noted a marked increase in their ability to understand the basic principles of an effective campaign. Participants have become gradually more focused on how the techniques are applicable to Azerbaijan. The Institute's implementation of a training program for regional party members and has begun creating a cadre of regional leaders who are well-versed in campaign skills. While this did not have an immediate result this quarter, it may become relevant once candidates are chosen and campaigning begins in earnest.

*Objective: To encourage women to be more involved in decision making processes in Azerbaijan.*

The women's roundtables have facilitated discussion among women about how to increase their participation in politics. The March 22 roundtable discussion focused on this topic, and the women were particularly engaged in devising solutions and suggestions for increasing their influence. The roundtable did not result in concrete action, but provided a forum for women who would not normally associate with one another to meet to discuss how to improve their representation in political and civic life. In future roundtables, NDI must be careful to direct the discussion toward more concrete actions, and to include more men.

## **V. EVALUATION**

The Institute has spent considerable time and resources reaching out to the government of Azerbaijan. NDI has reassured government and YAP officials that it is nonpartisan and is interested in working with all political actors. YAP began to accept NDI's assistance and some women who support the government participated in women's roundtables. The Institute was able to conduct party training in Baku. However, NDI's inability to travel outside Baku has prevented the Institute from conducting a full range of programming. NDI will continue to work with the government in an effort to begin conducting programming in the districts where parliamentary campaigns will take place.

## **VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES**

NDI will continue to reach out to the government and YAP as much as possible, while conducting programming for other parties. Once parties' plans for election campaigns are clarified, the Institute will work to train candidate teams.

NDI will continue to train and consult with smaller parties and independent candidates based on their level of support outside Baku.

NDI will hold the next policy discussion forum in Baku on April 12. The group will bring together NGOs, political party representatives, and government officials to facilitate discussion on legal reform.

The Institute plans to build on the success of its women's program by continuing to hold roundtables on involving women in the political process.

NDI will work with EMC in the coming months to assess the organization's ability to organize effectively in the regions. EMC will begin a program to conduct regional discussions beginning in April and NDI will provide them with some monetary assistance to do so. The discussions will seek to educate voters on their rights, the principles of free elections, and the importance of election monitoring. Through this activity, NDI will be better able to assess the organization's capacity and where there is room for improvement in advance of planning a large-scale monitoring effort.



## **VII. PERSONNEL**

Christine Quirk continued as office director. Adrienne Stone left Baku in February, and NDI hired Sasha Bruce as resident program officer to replace her. In NDI's Washington, D.C. office, Thomas Barry served as senior program manager and Chandra Luczak worked as program officer.

Tom Barry visited Baku on March 7-8 to discuss with the Embassy and USAID NDI's plans for the parliamentary elections. He also attended party consultations with Ali Kerimli and Isa Gambar.